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ABSTRACT

Tutor training programs in composition which emphasize interpersonal skills while offering concentrated correctness doses of mechanics and grammar are inherently limiting. While interpersonal skills are important, they only superficially address the complex situation of tutoring. A prescription for a healthy tutor program, one which would allow tutors to become paraprofessionals, must include measured doses of cognitive training. The tutoring program at the California State University (Northridge) combined Bloom's taxonomy into three "therapies": observation, interaction, and talk. Observation therapy is itself continuous and mirrors the peer collaboration techniques stressed in the program. Tutor trainees meet twice a week for a total of 3 hours. Once a month, the class is converted into a general meeting during which trainees and veteran tutors meet to discuss writing center experiences and issues and to engage in peripheral participation activities. Interaction therapy allows tutors to role play with the knowledge developed during observation therapy. Role playing emphasizes remembering and applying the generalizations and principles developed during observation treatment. Talk therapy, a tutor training course, focuses on the tutors' needs and allows the time for synthesis and evaluation by holistically and organically combining and recombining knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis. Knowledgeable, well prepared tutors are needed, especially on campuses with rapidly growing diverse populations. (Two figures representing aspects of the tutor training program are included.) (RS)

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Rx FOR TUTOR TRAINING

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Rx FOR TUTOR TRAINING

A brief survey of the current literature on writing centers and a glance through the National Directory of Writing Centers reveal that universal standards for tutors include writing proficiency, enjoyment of writing, enthusiasm and motivation. They also reveal that potential tutors are outstanding students who have superior grades and come highly recommended by composition directors, English department chairs, composition instructors or writing center directors who base the final selection on the potential tutor's writing experience and writing sample. Subsequently, believing that the English course work has given their trainees enough knowledge about writing (translated: grammar, mechanics, paragraph unity, organization, thesis sentence), and often limited by budget constraints and time, writing center directors rely on orientation-type programs which emphasize interpersonal skills such as eye contact, body language, and positive reinforcement while offering concentrated correctness doses of mechanics and grammar that tutors already know. This approach, however, is inherently limiting.

(SYMPTOMS) For one, while interpersonal skills are important, they only superficially address the complex situation we call tutoring. Even English majors have shortcomings. Often one-dimensional in their approaches, these students may have the background information, but may lack teaching techniques. They may hold all the secrets for correctness, and regardless of their peer label, they may develop acute intellectualitis, manifested in the

"I know, you don't" attitude. And, while intuitively they may be good writers and have a good ear for words, they don't necessarily understand why or how they come to put their ideas together as they do.

Moreover, even in the most culturally diverse schools where writing centers must work with special needs students, these orientation programs, because of time constraints, exclude an entire untapped non-traditional population from which they can draw tutors (multi-culturally diverse students, as well as those from other disciplines). Subsequently, primarily middle- to upper-class white students with little or no multicultural knowledge often comprise these programs, and although an orientation may offer them doses of ethnic diversity and cultural sensitivity training, the dosage usually is too small to effect significant attitude changes.

Thus, an orientation strategy not only perpetuates the notion of a writing center, as Stephen North perceptively notes in "The Idea of a Writing Center," as what a "cross between Lourdes and a hospice would be to serious illness..."(435), but also contributes to two major tutor diseases: academic elitism and cultural egocentricity.

Keeping this medical analogy in mind, we need only to look at orientation programs conducted in the field of emergency medicine to better understand the inherent limitations in short-term

tutor training programs. In a typical one-day emergency medicine class, students learn by rote how to control bleeding: direct pressure, elevation, pressure bandage, pressure point--all steps which have an immediate impact. But what about other professional concerns related to the rescuer and the victim, such as anxiety level, disease transmission, legal liability, ethical concerns, long-term health implications...?

(DIAGNOSIS) Likewise, a tutor orientation program provides the most fundamental and most quickly needed skills to enable tutors to work on writing problems; its trainers can conduct psychologically motivated discussions, as well as supply grammar handbooks and a map pointing out the route to the handouts file cabinet. But an orientation program cannot adequately train tutors to be holistic practitioners who can understand and assess other problems which may interfere with academic success. So in our minds, the tutors, not the tutees, need treatment to ensure the well-being of the community which they serve.

This treatment becomes even more imperative as multicultural populations in our universities and colleges continue to increase. Low dosage first-aid peer orientation methods just won't work any more. While we recognize the peer label we affix to our tutors, we also must acknowledge that tutoring is a paraprofessional activity (Moore and Poppino), not an exercise where facts or sets of

behaviors are memorized and regurgitated. Thus, as Irene Clark notes,

> learning to be a good tutor requires a self-examination and professional training beyond that which had been customarily provided....successful writing conferences do not simply "happen"....they occur because tutors have become experts in the field.... (vii)

As paraprofessionals, tutors warrant self-examination and training. While they may acquire affective skills in a "first-aid" orientation, in two days or less, they cannot develop the skills which would enable them to examine their linguistic and cultural biases; or think about tutoring and relationships; or contemplate the recursive nature of tutoring and learning processes. A prescription for a healthy tutor program, then, one which would allow tutors to become experts rather than paramedics, one which would inoculate them against "egocentric intellectualitis" must include measured doses of cognitive training.

(PRESCRIPTION) Towards this end, we looked to Benjamin S. Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain for our model because it fulfilled three basic program needs: it provided a "framework for viewing the educational process and analyzing its workings"; it allowed us "to specify objectives," as tutor trainers, "so that it [would] become easier to plan learning experiences and prepare evaluation devices," and, finally, it allowed us to develop course content which would elicit an "understanding of the educational

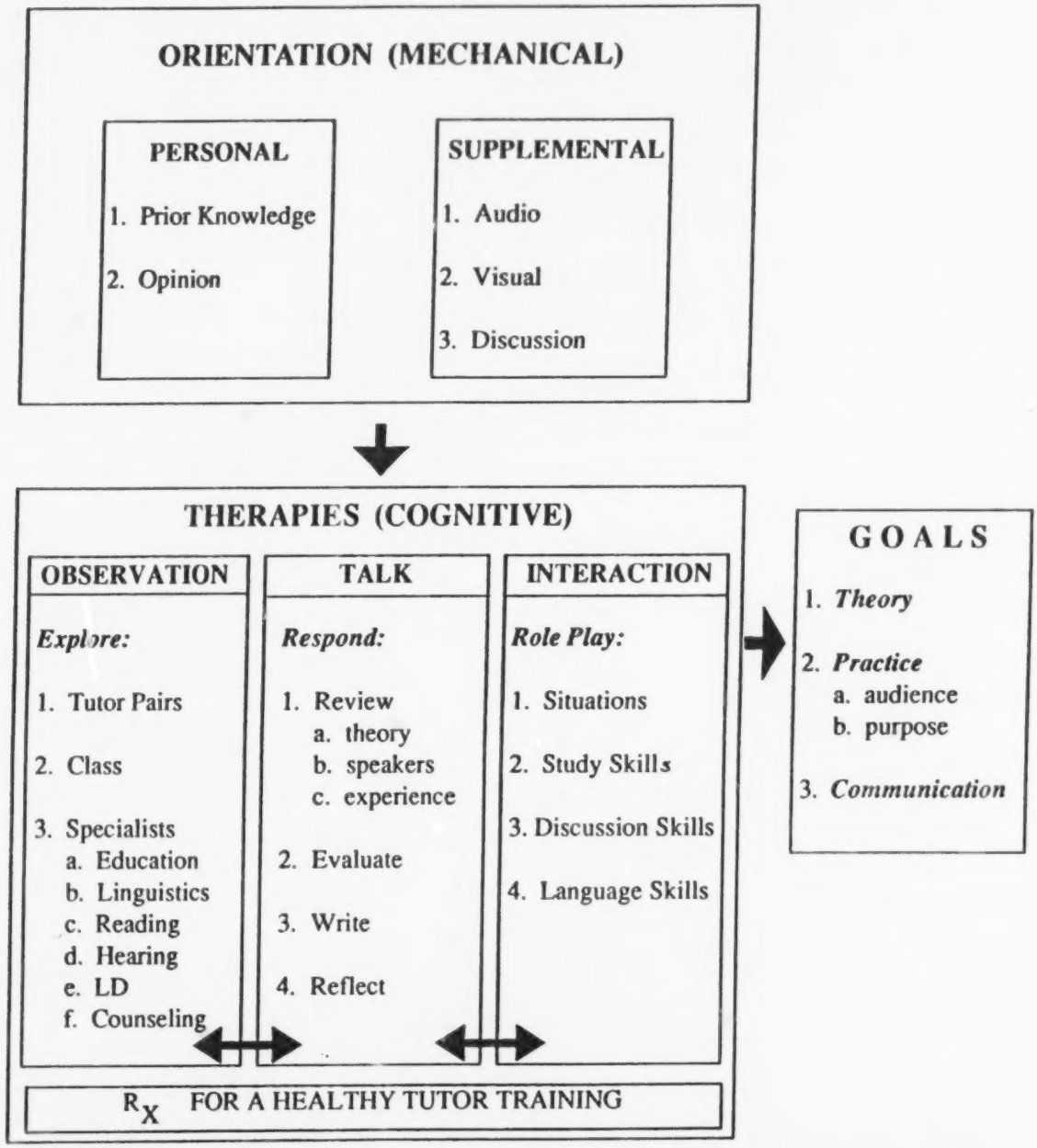
process and provide insight into the means by which the learner changes in a specific direction" (Bloom 2-3).

We considered the distinctions between the six classes of Bloom's taxonomy and combined them into the three that constitute our therapies, our prescription for healthy tutor training.[1] The chart below indicates how these therapies took their shape from Bloom's design:

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY	Rx THERAPY
1. Knowledge (recall) 2. Comprehension (basic understanding)	OBSERVATION
3. Application (utilize abstractions) 4. Analysis (break down/express relationships)	INTERACTION
5. Synthesis (put ideas together) 6. Evaluation (judge materials/methods)	TALK

Although the classification may appear to be rigidly hierarchical--moving from simple behaviors to complex behaviors--it is not designed to be linearly discrete. According to Bloom, the six major classes are constructed to reveal "their essential properties as well as the interrelationships among them"(17).

Considering Bloom's recognition that participation in "a particular simple behavior may become integrated with [participation in] other equally simple behaviors to form a more complex behavior"(18), we reconfigured the taxonomy, showing how our program departs from the orientation approach, as indicated below:



Bloom's behavioral philosophy is essential to the concept of our therapies, especially when tutors come into the program thinking they already know about writing. As they begin to work with students in the writing center, these "knowledgeable" tutors often discover that "what appears to be a writing problem may be much more" (Simpson 103).

(OBSERVATION THERAPY) Indeed, tutors may encounter students with limited academic skills, reading problems, learning disabilities, poor language skills, second language interference, cultural differences, physical handicaps, poor physical health, social handicaps or poor psychological health--all issues which could have an impact on the writing process. Knowledge and comprehension of the writing process alone, then, is not enough, nor is the quick infusion of lists of available school resources sometimes offered during orientation programs. While tutors do not have to, nor, realistically, may they be able to solve all problems, they do need to understand the underlying causes of multidimensional difficulties so that they can identify them and point students in the direction of the appropriate source who can help.

Drawing on the learning theory that "knowledge is...basic to all the other ends or purposes of education"(Bloom 33), and that comprehension depends on "<u>requisite</u> or <u>relevant</u> knowledge(Bloom 91; emphasis added), our Observation Therapy treats this lapse in

our tutors' education; it not only allows them to identify and cope with underlying learning problems, but also gives them the ability to develop a continuous assessment strategy.

Observation therapy is itself continuous and mirrors the peer collaboration techniques we stress. Our tutor trainees meet twice a week for a total of three hours. Once a month, the class is converted into a general meeting during which trainees and veteran tutors meet to discuss writing center experiences and issues and to engage in peripheral participation activities.

Initially, for the first two to three weeks after our writing center opens, tutor trainees practice a Chauncey Gardner-type "I like to watch" healthy voyeurism by pairing with veteran tutors in our writing center to observe tutoring nuances such as body language, active silences, and questioning techniques. During the course of this brief internship, the trainees and veterans meet to discuss the experience. At these meetings we not only see how quickly our tutor group has bonded, but also we hear time and again how much less anxious new tutors are about working in the center. Moreover, in the course of their observations, new tutors often inadvertently end up critiquing the veterans, who appreciate the feedback. Another minor benefit that results from this pairing is that the trainees see, rather than simply hear how we handle our paperwork.

We also invite guest speakers to our seminars to discuss other

problems which may interfere with the writing process. Involving our school's skilled professionals serves two purposes. For one, we give our program visibility and authority. For another, the seminar becomes a forum for tutors to learn about and to discuss issues such as reading, English as a second language, linguistics, learning and physical disabilities, social and psychological problems, to name a few. As a result, tutors acquire knowledge about:

--how cultural differences can affect writing approaches;

--how weak reading facility (word recognition, comprehension, the ability to infer) impedes students' ability to learn;

--why poor language facility (listening/speaking skills) may impede syntax and usage skills;

--what psychological or social interferences might be inferred from non-verbal cues (finger tapping, eye movement, body movement);

--how the lack of systematic study strategies (time management, notetaking, textbook reading, exam taking) can obstruct the learning process.

Tutors come away from these sessions knowing it is their ability to determine those obstacles which interfere with the writing process that ultimately will lead to a successful tutoring session. The resource information allows them to recognize that some problems are beyond their expertise and that it is all right to acknowledge the shortcoming and direct students to the appropriate sources who

can help. Most important, the information empowers tutors to recognize that tutors do not tell students about writing, but rather show them how they can learn.

(INTERACTION THERAPY) While Observation Therapy allows for developing the knowledge to treat academic, social, psychological and physical issues that may interfere with the writing process, Interaction Therapy allows tutors to do something with that knowledge. This "something"--role-playing--emphasizes remembering and applying the generalizations and principles developed during observation treatment. Because we believe, as does Bloom, that "the behavior in the recall situation is very similar to the behavior...during the original learning situation" (Bloom 62), we direct tutors to apply the collected information to various simulated situations in order to examine how personal and professional relationships interact with the writing process.

Why role-playing and not on-the-job training? Both are useful and we don't believe an either-or dilemma exists. Each becomes more effective because of the other. However, role-playing lets tutors experience the collaborative process and allows them to try out new techniques, lines of questioning, and approaches for handling troublesome clients in a non-threatening environment that allows for experimentation--with minimal risk--and immediate constructive feedback. The confidence the trainees develop shows up in actual tutoring sessions; they can approach each encounter with the deja vu to which Bloom refers.

Since role-playing activities need to develop complexity as the tutors develop their skills, exercises cannot and should not simply start and end with the traditional stratagem of partnering up, assigning tutor or client roles and looking at a "typical" problem paper. As Lil Branon tells us "problems of students in the writing center are often not restricted to writing problems"; tutors must be able "to interact well with their peers" (105). Thus, the most effective role-play will result from a blend of knowledge and personal experience. Consequently, we construct our role-playing exercises by drawing from Bloom's idea that students can restructure knowledge in a familiar context, even if discrete elements differ, and can:

> apply the appropriate abstraction without having to be prompted as to which abstraction is correct or without having to be shown how to use it in that situation. (Bloom 120)

No matter what tutorial workshops we construct, we always have our students look back at how knowledge from the classroom affects personal involvement. Thus, after each role-playing activity, tutors write self- and/or group analyses.

With careful planning and by applying the information acquired in observation therapy, then, role-playing activities can be developed to focus on skills such as:

--Listening/questioning techniques (open-ended vs. closed-ended, feeling vs. fact, paraphrasing)

--Developing positive nonverbal cues (body position, eye behavior, facial expressions)

--Recognizing linguistic/cultural/gender biases

--Understanding learning processes (auditory, visual, kinesthetic)

--Identifying study skills weaknesses (conceptualization, reading comprehension, time management)

--Perceiving social, emotional, psychological or medical interference

--Using support resources and referral methods.

One effective role-playing technique that applies and tests listening and questioning skills, perceived learning processes, and sensitivity to social or psychological interference without using writing center students as guinea pigs is to have tutors share their own writing. Tutors have a <u>real</u> vested interest in their own papers, so discussions are more meaningful and richer than if tutors look at and pretend to have written someone else's paper. Moreover, the feedback they receive from each other provides learning opportunities because tutors use the sessions as a mirror for observing the consequences of their behaviors, which they often don't see in actual conferences.

To help them become more aware of what they do and how they do it, we ask the tutors to pay attention to their feelings during the process, both as tutor and client. Afterwards, we ask each pair to enumerate these feelings, and then in a large group discussion, we

ask them to compare notes and discuss similarities and differences in their observations. As a result, on the one hand, tutors increase their ability to modify and change their tutoring stances. Through the experience, they learn that they will not get far on memorized facts and grammar tricks. On the other hand, although the lists of tutee behavior varies somewhat with each group of tutors we train, we have compiled a fairly representative dossier of client "types" which has helped the tutors identify and work with their most challenging clients, those who are dependent, demanding, manipulative, nervous or fidgety, delaying, timid or slow, chattering, silent, or angry.

In another role-play, to test the impact guest speakers have and to make a point about the learning transference process, we have tutors participate in workshops immediately after listening to our expert lecturers. For example, the week after hearing a speaker from our school's Education Department discuss reading and notetaking skills, followed by a speaker from our Linguistics Department who discussed how cultural differences affect structural writing patterns, the tutors broke up into small groups with specific instructions to write a summary paragraph of the linguist's lecture.

When we reconvened as a large group, we asked for two volunteers from different groups, one to share the notes from the lecture and the summary, and one to comment on the effectiveness of the notetaking and its influence on writing the summary. Because

the work and the comments are based on a real personal experience and on real student writing, all the tutors get caught up in the action. The two most directly involved get feedback on their tutoring effectiveness, and the class commentators learn by observing and listening to the participants' comments, as well as to each other's.

Other role-plays may focus on analysis and inference skills. In one particular role-play workshop, we ask veteran tutors to write up and bring in a brief synopsis of a particularly unusual or difficult tutoring session, without indicating how the session ended.

Again working in small groups first, the tutors discuss the discrete elements which contribute to or detract from the session and write down a prediction about how the session ended. Then the class reconvenes to compare notes. The large group discussion reveals how we handle the personal baggage we bring to tutoring sessions, what we do with the tutoring instruction we receive, how consistently we use that information and why we make the assessment or evaluations that we do.

Since a major tutoring goal is to transfer learning skills so that our writing center students can replicate these skills on their own, this Interactive Therapy not only allows tutors to experience myriad behaviors and learning styles they might encounter, but also lets them see how the transfer process works.

(TALK THERAPY) You may argue that Interactive Therapy and Observation Therapy are part of orientation programs. However, while orientation may provide an immediate sense of well-being for the tutors, an informal survey of our tutors, both those who went through our orientation program before we developed our training seminar and those who are taking our class now, reveals that this healthy feeling is short lived.

Orientations focus on the learning community's requisites rather than the tutors' needs. The small doses of information and role-playing therapy do not relieve the anxiety and stress tutors experience over the course of several months, nor do they ameliorate long-term ailments, such as the smug, superficial sense of knowledge with which most of our students come into tutoring programs.

Talk Therapy, our tutor training course, focuses on the tutors' needs and eliminates these disabilities; by adding the element of time, it allows for synthesis and evaluation by holistically and organically combining and recombining knowledge, comprehension, application and analysis. Unlike orientation programs which focus on the structure of the tutoring process by disseminating and looking at discrete elements, this therapy requires students to "draw upon the elements from many sources [e.g., Observation and Interaction] and put these together into a structure or pattern not clearly there before" (Bloom 162). At the same time, Talk Therapy gives the medicine, or pedagogy, that puts

the elements in context and allows the tutors to break down egocentric intellectual barriers they might experience in conferences.

Toward this end, we not only have tutors keep journals on their writing center experiences, both as observer and tutor, we also have them write annotated bibliographies on tutor pedagogy. At various times during the semester, as different issues arise, we discuss how--or if--one informs or contradicts the other, noting the attending variables.

Subsequently, tutors cultivate competence and confidence in their judgments. "With a firm foundation in theory and methods," one of our tutor trainees notes, tutors "can be confident enough to admit they don't know everything. [This course] remedies ego problems." Moreover, as another tutor suggests, Talk Therapy helps "develop good reasons for [an] intuitive sense of what is good."

The goal of Talk Therapy, then, is to strip away preconceived notions while building up a new authority. Through diverse reading (and the field is exploding with new literature about tutoring), in conjunction with talking to the "experts," putting theory into practice, and evaluating relationships among the elements, tutors begin to think about tutoring and learning processes, rather than simply recognize facts or sets of behaviors.

Most significant, Talk Therapy nurtures while it allows for diversity. In a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere, similar to the atmosphere our writing centers create for the students they

counsel, tutors see why large order global concerns are more important in the hierarchy of instruction than is grammar or mechanics, and they develop an acute understanding that students' problems may go beyond the writing task. Through continuous dialogue and their classmates' support, they feel freer to develop and test basic instructional techniques and alternative strategies than they would if they had used their writing center clients as experiments. And when we finally do send them off on their own, into the writing center and into the classroom to assist instructors, they are humble, yet confident about what they do. They are, above all, professionals.

Especially on campuses with rapidly growing diverse populations, we need knowledgeable, well-prepared tutors. Orientation and simple first-aid manuals are no longer enough. A course offers a prescription for healthy tutor training, and we like to think of the successful completion of that course as a "clean bill of health" which informs instructors and tutees that tutors have satisfied the learning community's concerns about wellness.

NOTES

[1] The following briefly describes the six classes; for a full definition of the classes, refer to Bloom's Taxonomy.

KNOWLEDGE in its early stages is a passive awareness which emphasizes recall or recognition of information, including jargon, facts, structural organization, conventions, and trends. COMPREHENSION adds objectives, behaviors and responses based on understanding the knowledge, which in turn develops new insight. "The emphasis is on the grasp of meaning and intent of the material" (144). Subsequently, as knowledge increases, so does the ability to use it.

APPLICATION pertains to the skill in using abstractions or generalizations and focuses on utilizing remembered information to test problem solving techniques, while ANALYSIS breaks down and considers the elements of information.

SYNTHESIS reconfigures the discrete information elements into an effective and appropriate structure and EVALUATION takes the cumulative construction of the other elements and considers their worth. Although synthesis and evaluation may appear to be last in cognitive development, they usually generate new knowledge/comprehension or application/analysis.

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